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PERSONAL INFLUENCE OF THE KAISER ON GERMAN PUBLIC LIFE.

BY WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.

IT is an attractive task to lay bare the various sources of the extraordinary influence exerted by the German Emperor upon the public life of the nation he rules. The world knows this influence to be very strong, but relatively little is generally understood as to whence it is derived. The purpose of this article is to show not only its extent on the different spheres of public activity in Germany, but also by what means the Kaiser has succeeded in so remarkable a degree in impressing his will, his aims and convictions upon his country.

The constitution of the Empire, on which the lawful powers and prerogatives of the head of the nation exclusively rest, does not confer on him a great abundance of either, hardly as much, in fact, as the constitution of this country delegates to the President. It divides the power of the Empire as such between the Kaiser, the Bundesrath or Federal Council, and the Reichstag or National Parliament. It makes the Kaiser chief commander of the military and naval forces; it invests him with the right of representing the Empire on all occasions in its dealings with foreign countries and their ambassadors and ministers, and of declaring war and concluding peace. But it grants the Kaiser no veto power to block unwise or unwelcome legislation, such as the President of the United States possesses; neither does it give him the duty or power to interfere in the internal affairs of any of the German states save the one whose monarch he is, making him in every respect, excepting those specified above, merely *primus inter pares*. The Bundesrath and the Reichstag are jointly entrusted with the right of legislating for the Empire, of framing, altering and passing bills which after approval by both bodies

become laws, although the Imperial Government may, and generally does, prepare and submit such bills, and these, of course, may more or less accurately reflect the personal wishes of the Kaiser. But it is at all times within the province of these two bodies to thwart the Kaiser in the matter of legislation.

The Bundesrath, particularly, is an organization whose functions are, on the whole, as defined by the constitution, nearly if not quite as important as those of the Kaiser. Its fifty-eight members are appointed by the governments of the twenty-six sovereign states which together compose the Empire; and its powers are not only legislative, like those of the Reichstag, but within certain limits supervisory and administrative as well. It also belongs exclusively to the Bundesrath to devise and set in force the rules and regulations for the execution of all laws. Prussia is represented within the Bundesrath by but seventeen out of the fifty-eight members, so that the Kaiser, even as King of Prussia, cannot sway the deliberations and decisions of this body.

The other branch of the legislative organization of the Empire, the Reichstag, is composed of 397 members, elected by general franchise, and representing, of course, every shade of political opinion, from the Socialist creed to the most reactionary shade of belief held by the so-called Junker Party. The splitting-up of political thought in Germany into almost a score of parties and factions, would in itself prevent the complete ascendancy of the Imperial will within this body, and, as a matter of fact, the Imperial Government is obliged to win over a majority of votes for every measure it desires passed. This is what Bismarck called "*Politik machen von Fall zu Fall*."

Thus, then, in theory, the power of the Kaiser to guide the legislation and administration of the Empire is seriously curtailed and, to some extent, even handicapped. But in practice this is true in a much less degree. As to the Bundesrath, though the seventeen Prussian votes directly controlled by the Kaiser are less than one-third of the total, there are always enough votes of the other states obtainable to give Prussia, which means the Kaiser, the majority. For, aside from the fear of displeasing the Kaiser, a sentiment which is strong in the bosoms of the smaller states and their rulers, and for which experience has furnished them good reason, Prussia's interests in any question or pending measure naturally run parallel with those of a number of its

neighbors. And the great weight which the interests of a state must naturally have which alone forms three-fifths of the territory and contains two-thirds of the population of the Empire, will be the decisive factor in many otherwise doubtful cases. At any rate, it is a fact that the Bundesrath, ever since it held its initial session in 1871, has in the end run counter to the Kaiser's and Prussia's serious interests in not a single instance.

The Reichstag, on its part, has not always been so amenable to the Kaiser's influence. On several occasions that body has rejected measures strongly urged by the Imperial representatives. Some of these measures have been definitely dropped, while others have again made their appearance and been finally passed, with or without alterations, as was the case with several of the bills for the increase of the army and navy. Nevertheless, the Reichstag has always been recognized by the Emperor as an uncertain element in his calculations, and as one which, in spite of the most clever manipulation, can never be depended upon to give effect to his wishes.

But, then, the powers of the Reichstag are more narrowly circumscribed than those of the Bundesrath; and the very fact that this body is composed of so many and so heterogeneous political units prevents it from becoming at any time a very formidable adversary, and from ever presenting a solid front against Imperial encroachments. It has, besides, no "patronage," so-called, to distribute and no other tangible favors to bestow.

The opposition, therefore, which the Kaiser has met, and is likely to meet in the future, from this quarter is much less serious than at first sight would appear to be the case. The amount of this possible opposition, however, is still measurably decreased by the personal influence of the Kaiser. For the Kaiser strikingly embodies an epitome of all the driving forces in the German character of to-day; and just as he in that capacity exercises a wellnigh mesmeric influence on the mind and imagination of the nation, so, too, he does on its representatives in the Reichstag. His masterful ways, and the forceful and picturesque manner in which he usually presents his views in public, greatly add to the authority of his personality. But he has still other means of impressing his will. Among these are speeches from the throne. These public enunciations, which in other countries are mere cut-and-dried papers to which little attention is paid, are

really meant by the German constitution to be nothing more. Under the present Kaiser's predecessors they *were* nothing more. They were read in a perfunctory manner, precisely as worded by the Imperial Chancellor. But William II. did not follow in his grandfather's footsteps in this respect. He has repeatedly and in a dramatic manner disregarded the exact wording, and even the spirit and substance, of the manuscript prepared for him by his Chancellors, and strongly infused them with his own ideas and opinions. From impersonal and unimpressive documents, such as the constitution contemplated, his throne speeches have become sensational events, reverberating through the whole Empire, and stamping in advance as his personal opponents, nay, enemies, all those delegates in Reichstag and Diet who resist the passage of the measures proposed by him. The receptions the Kaiser accords, in conformity with a long-established custom, to the presiding officers of the legislative bodies, and which under William I. were merely formal, are regularly turned to the same account by the present Kaiser. By strong and eloquent suasion on these occasions, the Kaiser has several times turned the scale in favor of important measures.

William II. has often given public utterance to his conviction that the most potent support of his throne is his army. It is not surprising, therefore, that he has steadily aimed at keeping that pillar of his strength perfectly under his own control. In doing this he has made use of every available means. All the year round finds him busy attending parades, manœuvres, anniversaries of battles, birthdays of sovereign or otherwise distinguished chiefs of a number of his regiments, and delivering speeches, toasts, formal or impromptu addresses, in which he never fails to inculcate precepts and traditions of loyalty and of every other military virtue, seizing, too, opportunities thus afforded him to pay compliments to the heads of allied or friendly nations, or to express other sentiments likely to benefit Germany in her political relations. Above all, though, he fraternizes with the officers of the army at luncheons or banquets given at their barracks, to which he invites himself. His after-dinner remarks on such occasions have often astounded the world, but from his own point of view, that of commander-in-chief of the army, they have been highly effective, and have tended to knit still more firmly the bonds which unite the army to his person. Then there is the entire

category of rewards and punishments, which he, as head of the army, dispenses at will—promotions, orders and decorations, praise or censure meted out to individuals or bodies in army orders and bulletins; confirmations, revisions or nullifications of sentences imposed by courts-martial. It will easily be understood that these varied and constantly applied means alone suffice to make the influence of the Kaiser over his army an element of surpassing force. But to all this must be added the influence he acquires through his “Military Cabinet.” This is a bureau under his exclusive control, whose mission it is to supply him daily, by regular verbal or written reports, with that wealth of personal details about his army, and especially about the corps of officers, which enables him to know at all times the exact spirit and degree of efficiency noticeable in each regiment, even each company or squadron, and which lends to his personal relations with the army a spice of intimacy and comprehensive knowledge which is of enormous value. It is credibly asserted that the Kaiser personally knows half of the 25,000 officers in his army.

His “Naval Cabinet,” whose scope of duties is similar, is largely responsible for his intimate knowledge of the ships and men composing the German navy. His constant visits to the naval vessels also have a share in this, and it is probably true that he personally knows every one of the 123 vessels and 1500 naval officers under his command.

As regards the citizen population, and more particularly the immense corps of government officials, his “Civil Cabinet,” of which Herr von Lucanus is the dreaded chief, puts him in a position to acquire a great deal of similarly intimate knowledge about it. Thousands of petitions, letters of thanks, special reports, etc., reach him in the course of every year through this “cabinet” which give him a keen insight into the lives, ambitions, and aims of the middle and higher classes. The peculiar passion for titles and decorations, for which the Germans themselves have coined the word “*Titelsucht*,” likewise furnishes the Kaiser with a strong lever by which to turn people at will. Every winter—on January 18th, as a rule—the so-called “*Ordensfest*,” or Fête of Decorations, is celebrated at the Berlin court, when between 5,000 and 8,000 newly decorated citizens, drawn from every walk of life, are invited to court, file before the Kaiser and his consort, and are subsequently regaled in a number of the

most splendid apartments of the Old Castle, and affably treated by a large and gorgeously attired body of flunkies. Thus an indelibly sweet and powerful impression is left on the minds of this heterogeneous multitude, largely composed of unsophisticated and intensely loyal denizens of rural districts or smaller towns. The official organ of the Empire on the afternoon of that day publishes a special edition, containing on a score of quarto pages the full names, callings, etc., of all these happy persons, together with a minute classification of the decorations and medals awarded, and all the newspapers in the Empire reprint the list, wholly or in part. The present Kaiser has used this quite inexpensive but very effective mode of rewarding loyal subjects with steadily increasing lavishness, and has invented a number of new decorations, besides. He indulges the ambition for titles with like generosity and with like effect.

By vastly increasing the splendors of his court, the Kaiser has also materially heightened his personal influence. The simple and unostentatious manners and customs prevailing at the Berlin court during the days of William I. have been superseded by an elaborateness of ceremonial, a brilliancy of appointments and costumes, and a display of taste and refined luxury which rival, and in some features even surpass, the elegancies of the Tuileries under Napoleon III. The exterior and interior of Berlin Castle, and of several other royal homes belonging to the Prussian monarchs, have been renovated and embellished, and connoisseurs claim that the so-called White Hall in Berlin Castle, in its new guise, is the most beautiful and chaste extant. The banquets given by the Kaiser on grand days enjoy a deservedly high reputation among European diplomats, and the royal cellars are unequalled to-day in any capital. The pressure to attend the Berlin court festivities has on account of all this become stronger every year. But in like ratio has the Kaiser's tendency increased to render these festivities exclusive.

All these means used by the Kaiser to extend and strengthen his influence on every class of the population are legitimate. But some other means he uses are open to serious objection, for they amount to nothing less than an overriding of the constitution. It was Bismarck who drew up that fundamental instrument, and it contains provisions clearly defining not alone the powers and prerogatives of the Emperor, but also those of the Imperial Chan-

cellor. One of these provisions is to the effect that every public utterance by the Emperor, oral or written, must receive the sanction of the Imperial Chancellor to acquire the character of a government emanation. Without that such utterances are to be considered merely as private enunciations, having no binding force on the sovereign, the government, or the nation. The constitution provides that every document signed or written by the Emperor in his public capacity must have the counter-signature of the Imperial Chancellor, whereby he, the Chancellor, assumes the responsibility for it toward the nation and its representatives in Bundesrath and Reichstag, and becomes amenable to them. Bismarck in his Memoirs says that the intent was to render the Chancellor alone responsible, he having identified himself with the monarch's act or expression by his signature, and thus "shield" the sovereign; the further inference being that if it becomes manifest at any time that the nation, through the majority of its representatives, disapproves of measures or opinions thus endorsed by the Chancellor, the sovereign has the simple remedy of dismissing the Chancellor and appointing a successor.

This important provision of the German constitution has been practically nullified by the Kaiser for many years past. He has declared himself in favor of projects or pending measures; he has proclaimed a new policy, or an important alteration in an old one; he has launched the ship of state into the troubled waters of a dangerous adventure, without even first consulting with his Chancellor. This he did throughout the Hohenlohe régime, and he has done it on several occasions since the present Chancellor came into power. The seizure of Kiaochou was a step undertaken not alone without the knowledge of the Chancellor, but directly against his will. If Germany at that time had become involved in war with China, that war would have been due to a flagrant violation of the constitution by the Kaiser. Public declarations have been made scores of times by the Kaiser, condemning or approving men and measures, without previous consultation with his Chancellors. Yet, while thus ignoring the constitution himself, the Kaiser has, when such utterances of his were adversely criticised, taken advantage of the existing very illiberal judicial practice, by prosecuting such critics, whom he, on a conspicuous occasion, styled "*Nörgler*" (fault-finders), and whom he advised to "shake the dust of the fatherland off their shoes." If these

utterances of his had been made with the consent, or over the signature, of the Imperial Chancellor, they would have become fit subjects for criticism within reasonable bounds. But by this doubly unfair proceeding on the Kaiser's part neither the Reichstag nor the nation at large is permitted to pronounce public judgment on his sayings and doings.

Again, the Kaiser has, contrary to the constitution, practically monopolized the direction of the foreign policy of Germany for many years—in fact, ever since the retirement of Bismarck. The Empire's foreign policy, by the explicit terms of the constitution, is left wholly to the Chancellor. If the Kaiser be not satisfied with the Chancellor's foreign policy, he can dismiss him. But the Kaiser found it more to his taste to shape the Empire's foreign policy entirely according to his own ideas, making the Chancellor, at least in this important respect, a mere figure-head. Bismarck, with whom he first tried these tactics, would not submit and was retired. Caprivi, a soldier before being a statesman, and regarding the Kaiser solely as his commander-in-chief, obeyed blindly. Hohenlohe, who was of a different moral and intellectual fibre, disliked being thus cavalierly treated, and finally resigned. How long von Bülow will submit to this treatment remains to be seen.

These are the two most important features in which the Kaiser shows a studied and persistent disregard of the constitution. But there have been other, less important, instances in which he has shown small respect for the instrument which created his position. These autocratic leanings of his would, in other countries with a longer past of constitutionalism, be a most dangerous defect. But in Germany, where parliamentarism is an importation, which has by no means as yet been as firmly established as in England, France, or even Italy, these absolutistic tendencies of the Emperor figure not nearly so prominently in the people's eyes as one might think. For what in Germany is termed the "monarchic principle" is rooted very deeply in the heart of the nation as a whole. The Socialists are the only exception; all the rest of the nation, say three-fourths of it, is intensely monarchic.

But, after all, it is the personal influence of the Kaiser which is most potent. His forceful personality simply compels attention. For years after his accession millions of Germans stood aloof, ignoring his kaleidoscopic activity, and firmly believing that after he had "sown his wild oats," and after the novelty of the

situation into which he had been summoned so unexpectedly had worn off, he would cease his pyrotechnic interference in every phase of public life. But these would-be "indifferents" were forced to abandon their attitude. When, after one of his speeches, often ill-advised, flamboyant and overshooting the mark, but always striking and earnest, the press of the whole world would be ringing with comment, and at every German fireside heated discussions *pro* and *con* would take place, these sober-minded Germans, while still condemning his methods, found it impossible to stand supinely aside. The Kaiser, on every weighty problem that came to the surface for solution, would split the nation into two hostile camps, stimulating discussion and keeping both adherents and opponents of his views at fever heat. It is this sensational side of his personal influence, probably more than any other, which has been, and is still being, felt most strongly. Into every political campaign in Germany he has thrown fire-brands in the shape of mottoes, pithy and apt sayings, sarcastic allusions, or ironical retorts to his adversaries. Every weapon of warfare has been successfully employed by him.

When the Kaiser disapproved of the violent Agrarian agitation in 1894, he coined the phrase: "You cannot expect me to sanction bread usury." And the phrase flew like wildfire all over Germany. When he dedicated the important Baltic-North Sea Canal, he said: "Oceans unite; they do not sever," and, similarly: "The world's present motto is, 'Easy Communication.'" When he considered it necessary to check the advancing tide of Socialism, he spoke of the Socialist party, numerically the largest in his Empire, as: "A horde of men unworthy to bear the name of Germans." And the bitter words still rankle in the breast of every German Socialist. When he rebuked the Ultramontane Centre Party for refusing to do honor to Bismarck on his eightieth birthday, he said: "This is a national disgrace, unequalled in modern history." When he had veered around in his ideas on the Agrarian question, he said: "Agriculture is the backbone of the country, and it must be protected." He coined the phrase about the "Greater Germany," and said: "Our future lies upon the water"; and, more strongly: "Without the consent of Germany's ruler, nothing must happen in any part of the world." His sayings about the "mailed fist," about "planting the banner of Germany upon the walls of Peking," about the "yellow danger,"

and all the other highly colored and startling sentences descriptive of his conception of the situation in China, are still in everybody's recollection.

Now and then he has been checkmated, or even defeated outright. But despite occasional rebuffs, the Kaiser, in nine cases out of ten, has had his way, and is likely to have it in the future. His influence to-day is felt more strongly than that of any other single factor in Germany. In some ways this has been beneficial to Germany. It has led to the adoption of the most comprehensive plan of naval increase. It has infused more enterprise and self-confidence into the nation. It has inaugurated Germany's World Policy. Despite the fact that the nation gave undue prominence to sentimental considerations during the Spanish and the Boer wars, and thereby embittered relations, first with this country, and next with England, it has steered the ship of state so cleverly as to lead to the present *rapprochement* with this nation, and to a maintenance of correct relations with England.

The Kaiser's influence upon education and upon science in Germany has been great and, in the main, wholesome. He has clearly perceived the urgent need of remodelling the German educational system on new lines, lines more in accord with the requirements of this age of practical things; and his ideas, though at first they met the united opposition of the professional pedagogues of the old school, are now slowly prevailing. In the wide domain of applied science the Kaiser's influence has also wrought a vast amount of good.

But the incalculable harm done by the Kaiser's influence in other fields of public life probably more than balances accounts. For one thing, it has lowered the national standard of political thought and liberty. To all intents and purposes Germany, though nominally enjoying a constitutional form of government, is ruled autocratically.

On German literary and art life the personal influence of the Kaiser has also been noxious in the highest degree. He has waged, with more or less success, a savage war upon that highly interesting movement known variously as "Secessionist" or "Realistic," and of which, in literature, Hauptmann and Sudermann have been the main standard bearers, and in art, Böcklin, Liebermann, Klinger, Thoma, Stuck, and others. With all his might he has fought this movement, the most promising Germany

has known for a century, and despite its extreme and unwise partisans one powerfully moulding German thought and ideals. In place of it the Kaiser has, so far as lay in his power, substituted tame mediocrity, as strikingly exemplified by his own marble "ancestral gallery" in the Siegesallee in Berlin, and by the bombastic historical dramas of Joseph Lauff, the latter owing their very existence to the Kaiser's inspiration.

But perhaps the most portentous injury, and certainly the most completely achieved, done to German public life by the Kaiser's personal influence, is that inflicted upon the press and periodical literature. The freedom of the press, guaranteed not only by the Imperial Constitution, but by those of Prussia and the other German states, has been practically destroyed by him. The practice of the courts all over Germany, from the lowest to the highest, has been, since the accession of William II., growingly and steadily illiberal and systematically inimical to the press. Honest expression of opinion, whenever it contravened the Kaiser's ideas and convictions, has been so persistently and severely punished that it may be said to be effectually muzzled. There has never been any régime in Germany, so far as the records go, during which convictions for *lèse majesté* and all sorts of press offences have been even approximately as numerous. All this is not only in consonance with the Kaiser's wishes, but it is in large measure directly due to him, the appointment of the judges forming the highest tribunal in the Empire, and the positions leading up to this highest court, being under his control. The Kaiser has never during the fourteen years of his reign pardoned a single one of these offenders against his own dignity, nor even shortened, in any instance, their penalty. Besides, he has often expressed downright hostility to a free press.

In the Kaiser's veins mingle strange and unharmonious elements—the blood of the Hohenzollerns, than which there is none more matter-of-fact in Europe, nor more cool and well disciplined, and the blood of the Guelphs, than which there is none more stubborn, proud and unruly. William II. shows very distinctly this double lineage in his physical as well as his mental make-up. When one keeps this in mind, the discordant qualities of his personal influence, in its baneful as well as its beneficial effects, are more justly appreciated and adjusted.

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.